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INTRODUCTORY NOTES TO A GRAMMAR OF CAHUILLA

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Introductory Notes to a Grammar of Cahuilla

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1. Preliminary Remarks

These notes grew out of my preoccupation with writing a grammar of a particular language, Cahuilla, which is spoken in Southern California and belongs to the Uto-Aztecan family. The reader who would like to know how the conclusions put forward in this introduction were arrived at should read the appropriate chapters in the Grammar (Seiler 1976 [in ^{press} print]). Each of the principal chapters (Phonology, Morpho-Syntax, Syntax, and Semantics), and some of the major subchapters contain, in an introductory section, a synoptic view of the salient characteristics found on that particular level of description. The attention is focused on the interrelations among these characteristics and on the hierarchical structure of the interrelations. The Introduction to the Grammar as a whole - of which two sections are reproduced here in a modified version - tries to integrate the synoptic views of the different chapters into a series of comprehensive statements. The statements cluster around two topics: 1. A presentation of Cahuilla as a type of language. 2. Remarks on writing a grammar.

In connection with the first mentioned topic, one might wonder how a grammar of a single language could contribute to typology. In his penetrating analysis of typological methodologies, Joseph H. Greenberg (Greenberg 1974:24ff.) has described an individualising approach which is linked to portraiture of a single language. This approach stresses the differences rather than the

similarities with other languages. In trying to explain linguistic phenomena it tends to transcend the domain of linguistics proper, advocating such uncontrollable concepts as that of "Weltanschauung" and "Sprachgeist". In contrast to this approach, Greenberg has rightly stressed the need for a more nomothetic orientation of language typology, for the discovery of lawlike generalisations in languages by drawing bounds to the concept 'possible human language'; in short, for discovering universals, frequently implicational in form. Greenberg's outstanding contributions to fulfilling these requirements are well known to all of us.

The detailed study and grammatical description of a single language can indeed lead to typological statements. But a fruitful study of this kind must be different from the above mentioned individualising approach. In order to write a grammar we must have a sufficiently developed concept of what is possible in human language. There seem to be three ways of arriving at such a concept: 1. The analytic-definitional way. 2. The way of accidental observation. 3. The synthetic way (corresponding to Kant's "synthetische Erkenntnisse a priori")¹. The third is the one that seems most promising in this context. It is synthetic inasmuch as the diversity of languages is essential for arriving at the notion of a 'possible human language'. Comparison with other languages, preferably of widely differing structure, is therefore one of the necessary prerequisites for writing an adequate grammar of a single language, although the comparative statements as such need not appear in that grammar.² The synthetic way is also a priori inasmuch as it should lead us to an understanding of a language (and of language in

general) as a set of techniques - and not merely as a set of facts. Techniques - and not facts - serve certain definite purposes,³ mainly of communication. The techniques of a single language for serving such purposes seem to me to constitute the dimensions along which we might typologise the languages of the world. I believe that it should ultimately be possible to typologically compare languages as total systems and not only particular aspects of languages. A tremendous number of facts are known about a great many languages. Rarely do we get a description of a language where the details are understood as manifestations of certain clearly defined techniques which can be understood teleonomically. Defining such techniques should be the task of a grammar of a single language. To the extent that this aim is realised, such a grammar contributes to language typology.

2. Cahuilla as a Type

Neither the investigator of a language nor the reader of the grammar should be content with a mere presentation of the facts of a language, no matter how well organised and insightful this may be. What we should like to know is what this language is like, i.e. the underlying design, so that we can compare it with other languages - provided we have a sufficiently clear idea of what they are like in their turn. This is, of course, the question of typology, and broaching this question is, I believe, as far as the grammarian of a single language can go.⁴

Trying to answer the question of what a language is like and trying to enumerate all the facts of a language are of course not

the same thing. And clearly, we shall never come any closer to the essence of the language if our grammar contains nothing but the bare facts. I find myself in agreement with Eugenio Coseriu's tenet (Coseriu 1966/1975:1f.) to the effect that a language system is not a system of 'facts' but rather a system of techniques. It would therefore seem to me senseless, if not impossible, to represent a language as a mere accumulation of facts.

Even if we are agreed on this point, our problems are not over; for then we are confronted by an even more difficult question: what is the basic design of this language? How can we hope to elucidate it? We do not have any established methodology at our disposal.⁵ Edward Sapir (1921/1949:14ff.) in typologically comparing Takelma and Greek, has anticipated what is involved here and what should be the aim of future scholarly efforts. He speaks of some 'great underlying groundplans', 'some deep controlling impulse to form that dominates their drift'. 'If, therefore, we can only be sure of the intuitive similarity of two given languages, of their possession of the same submerged form-feeling, we need not be too much surprised to find that they seek and avoid certain linguistic developments in common. We are at present very far from able to define just what these fundamental form intuitions are.'

I am now going to present what I think to constitute the essential traits of Cahuilla, which I understand as manifestations of certain basic techniques. For detailed accounts the reader is referred to the Grammar. And I repeat that the decisive organising hypothesis which allows us to pull together all these various characteristics into a unified picture of a 'type' is that of teleo-

nomy or purposiveness (Seiler 1973a). If it is the case - as Sapir (l.c.144) very aptly puts it - 'that linguistic features that are easily thinkable apart from each other, that seem to have no necessary connection in theory, have nevertheless a tendency to cluster or to follow together in the wake of some deep controlling impulse to form ...', the reason for this is that these features concur in constituting basic techniques serving fundamental purposes, and that the possibilities for linguistic features to 'cluster or to follow together' are limited, as are the purposes themselves.

One basic trait of Cahuilla is the strong preponderance of the descriptive over the labeling principle (see IV, 1.1.4., and IV, 5.). Descriptivity is dominant in the realm of nouns. It serves the purpose of naming objects of nature, culture, or thinking. The descriptive principle consists in the transformation of a proposition into a term, syntactically speaking: of a sentence (basically a verb form) into a word (basically a noun). To give an example: In order to name the object 'arrow', a proposition describing its properties (hence our term 'descriptive') 'it is straightened', is transformed into a term: 'that which is straightened', 'the straightened one'. Such a term, which, as the translation equivalents indicate, is a relativised nominal, I shall call an absolute expression. It is absolute, because it leaves open no places to be filled by appropriate arguments. As a metapredication it asserts conformity between naming and object to be named: in our example: "that which is straightened' applies [to the object under consideration]." The other major semantic class of expressions I shall call relational. In contradistinction to the absolute expressions, the relational ones require a definite number of places to be filled by appropriate

arguments. E.g. the verb corresponding to the English 'straighten' is a two-place predicate. Certain Cahuilla nouns, e.g. kinship, body, or implement terms, are also relational. For every relational expression there is a corresponding absolute expression in the language, while the opposite is not true. Thus, the absolute expressions in Cahuilla are more basic than the relational ones.

There is a constant operator in the language effectuating the transformation from proposition to term, the so-called absolutive suffix, which has long been recognised as a noteworthy feature of Uto-Aztecan languages.

The transformation of a proposition into a term by means of an absolutivisation has two corollaries: 1. The analysability and morphological transparency of a considerable portion of all nominal expressions; e.g. in the word for 'arrow' the verb stem for 'to straighten' is immediately recognisable; such designations are thus (relatively) motivated. 2. A specialisation or narrowing of the meaning of the term as compared with the meaning of the proposition: In the case of our example, while it is understandable that the term for 'arrow' should derive from the activity of straightening (which in the process of constructing an arrow is the decisive activity), it is by no means the case that every straightening results in an arrow.

The descriptive principle must have been alive in the language for a long time, and it is still operative. It can serve as an ^eexemplary case for the notion of 'technique' as postulated

by E. Coseriu (l.c.). With some terms the specialisation of their meaning is rather advanced, and also their morphological shape has changed in the course of time so that from originally having been descriptive they move in the direction of becoming unanalysable, unmotivated labels. But then, quite often, a new transformation 'proposition → term' is effectuated so that both synchronically and diachronically the process of absolutivisation seems to be cyclically applicable. Thus, the color term for 'blue' appears as an absolutivised 'that which comes close to heaven', and the word for 'heaven' in turn is derived from 'the thing where carrying [of the sun?] takes place'.

If it was said above that the descriptive principle is dominant in Cahuilla this can be substantiated, above all, by the facts that it is applied cyclically, that it is constantly recurring in different domains of word formation, and that it organises a great number of features of the language which, otherwise, would appear unconnected.

The dominance of the descriptive technique has numerous consequences for the structure of the language. If absolute nouns by themselves may assert that, e.g., "'that which is straightened' applies ...", two things follow: 1. They are not simply nouns but actually represent an atomic sentence. 2. They do not refer to a specific, individual item, but instead, to a whole class; in the case of our example the translation could also be phrased as 'the straightened-like thing'. Now, if absolute nouns are the basis of the whole noun system, a strong predominance of classificatory expressions must be the consequence. The language may seek to achieve

a balance. This is how I am inclined to explain the extraordinary wealth and frequency of individuating ('distributive') morphemes of Cahuilla (see II, 2.1.4.2.2., and IV, 4.2.).

Another consequence of the descriptive technique whereby sentences are transformed into words is the importance of the word as a syntactic and semantic entity. An independent confirmation of this will be provided later when we go on to consider the verb.

A second basic trait of Cahuilla consists in what might be called 'syntactic compression'⁶ (see III, Introduction). It will be shown that the domain of syntactic inquiry in this language quite frequently extends below the word level. In the morphosyntax a surprisingly high number of derivational affixes are homophonous or near-homophonous with independent verb roots. Such synchronic and diachronic processes as subject raising and predicate raising create single clauses where previously there were more than one, and 'the new form very frequently turns out to be a single word predicate with a subject and possibly an object...' (Jacobs 1974:236). Just as a simple sentence, then, may go into an absolute noun (descriptive principle), a complex sentence may go into a verb-predicate (principle of syntactic compression); and again, this latter process is accompanied by a specialisation in meaning. What we shall find are manifold transitions from complex syntagms to compounds on the one hand, and to word groups on the other; and from word groups to affix constructions. These phenomena must be seen in the appropriate dynamic perspective: They point to the progressive integration of syntactic material within one and the same word, - a process of integration which is still operative in the language.

One major consequence of the dominance of the principle of syntactic compression seems to be that the expression of subordinative relations such as cause, finality, consecutivity and conditionality, is largely a matter of verb derivation (see III, 6.1.-6.5.). No particular hypotactic elements (such as conjunctions) are found. In all the cases mentioned a paratactic expression is also possible, where subordination remains altogether unexpressed.

Both the descriptive principle and the principle of syntactic compression underline the important role of the word as a unit. And both principles are reflected in the phonology and the morphophonemics of this language. We shall find (see I,2.) that little fusion exists between the stem and inflectional affixes; and little fusion also between root and derivational affixes. There is little obliteration of morpheme boundaries by morphophonemic processes. A characteristic process on the contrary, that of glottalisation (I, 2.6.) serves to separate outer-layer elements from inner-layer structures within the word.

A final basic trait - which fits well with the other traits mentioned - I term the principle of "weak centralisation". It has a wide application ranging from phonology over morphology and syntax to semantics.

In phonology (see I, 1.2.) the principle is manifested by a relatively even distribution of the energies of loudness and pitch over the entire stress unit, which in this language is the word. In contrast to languages with strongly centralising accent there is not one single place in the word which attracts all the energy and leaves

all the other segments in a weakened position, but there is regular alternation between accented and unaccented segments.

In morpho-syntax, syntax, and semantics the principle influences the organisation of such 'roles' as the agent, object, localisation, time, and circumstances within the sentence. It is manifested by a lack of monopolisation. E.g. a pronominal element pertaining to one specific function like the subject, or the object, may be appended not only to the verb but also to an adverb, and even to a conjunctive particle 'and' (see I, 2.1.2.). As one might expect, the ties between pronominal prefixes and the verb stem are rather loose in Cahuilla. Pre- and postpositions as indicators of place, time, and circumstances may be appended to nouns, to verbs, and to adverbs. Certain deictic elements may equally well combine with pronouns, verbs, and adverbs.

It is important to note in this context that the translated equivalent of an English sentence most often represents an aggregate consisting of several atomic sentences: Absolute nouns, as we have seen, are atomic sentences ("x' applies", "it is an 'x'"). Verb forms also represent full-fledged sentences. The same holds for independent pronouns ("it is I"), and even for adverbs ("it is in this direction"). Given such a situation, one might well wonder how such aggregates can become organised into what we would call a sentence. This is where the clitics come in (see II, 2.2.). Both because of their number and because of the frequency with which they appear in the texts, the clitics are an extremely important feature of the language. On the phonological level they connect with the alternating, weakly centralising stress pattern. And functionally they coordinate or

subordinate, they serve to distinguish topic and comment, to mark quotation, truth, validity, quantification, etc.

In lieu of a summary let us ask - and briefly answer - the question: What does this typological picture reveal to us about the language?

It shows us how Cahuilla solves a number of basic problems of language communication:

1. The problem of reference, of referring to objects, of naming an infinite multitude of things by finite means: by predication.
2. The problem of keeping naming and predication distinct: by absolutivisation.
3. The problem of organising a multitude of predications into a surveyable syntactic unit: by syntactic compression.
4. The problem of keeping systematically distinct the reference to classes and the reference to individuals: by individualisation ('distributives').
5. The problem of distributing roles (agent, object, locale, etc.) over the sentence: by weak centralisation.
6. The problem of foregrounding, backgrounding, coordination, expressing truth and validity: by the clitic elements.

3. On Writing a Grammar

There has been much discussion in the literature of the last twenty years on how a grammar should be written, on what a complete grammar should account for, on the observational,

descriptive, and explanatory adequacy of grammars. Unfortunately those who discuss these things are not identical with those who really write grammars. What they offer to substantiate their claims are at best fragments of grammars, or rather: fragments of sections of grammars, such as, for example, fragments of a section of syntax. The discrepancy between what these authors claim for their work (viz. completeness), and what they achieve sometimes verges on the grotesque.

What could one reasonably expect from a 'complete' grammar? Must it really account for every phenomenon that exists in the language? We know that this would be an open-ended task. There is dynamism in a language, there is variation and diversification at work almost every minute. Therefore a complete grammar, if such a thing is possible, cannot be exhaustive in the way characterised above.

It seems to me that a grammar deserves to be called complete to the extent that it succeeds in representing the language under study as a type. Such a grammar may omit certain details and still be fairly complete, provided the phenomena left out can be integrated into the picture in the wake of some basic characteristics analysed in the grammar. What then should we consider as the basic or typologically relevant traits? From my own experience I would say that those are the traits that have the greatest 'clustering' effect: The more far-reaching a trait can be shown to be, the more it serves to unify 'linguistic features that are easily thinkable apart from each other, that seem to have no necessary connection in theory' (Sapir, l.c. 144),

the more relevant is the trait. As I have shown in section 2., the basic typological traits of a language correspond to certain basic tasks which a language as an instrument of communication must fulfill. The reconstruction of these basic tasks is, of course, a matter of a general theory of language and cannot be further pursued here.

The task of the future, then, is to locate these basic traits. But before we embark on such investigation it might be well to recognise obstacles in the form of theoretical and methodological misconceptions that must be overcome before we can hope to succeed.

One class of basic misconceptions concerns the grammatical levels, i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. There are two directions in which these misconceptions become operative, which I would call, respectively, compartmentalisation and reductionism.

The endless and fruitless discussions about the boundaries between levels are well known. No matter whether one claims that there are or there are not definite boundaries between morphology and syntax, or between syntax and semantics, one is in either case concerned with compartments to be filled by facts. The view adopted in this Grammar is not one of compartments but rather one of perspectives. The preoccupations with separation or non-separation of levels, both emanating from a compartmental view, should be replaced by an inquiry into distinguishing qualities of the various levels.

Most certainly the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics are distinct, in the sense that they represent different ways of looking at facts of language which may be different but which also may be one and the same. Linguistic facts have different dimensions corresponding to different communicative functions which they fulfill. Grammatical levels are nothing God-given; recognising their justification means recognising their connections with the different dimensions of communicative functions.

The other misconception, reductionism, operates by reducing certain grammatical levels to other levels. The experiments are well-known: Linguists attempted to reduce semantics to syntax, and now syntax to semantics. An important impulse for reductionism seems to come from the false ideal of a grammar conceived as a continuous algorithm. Nothing can be farther from reality than that. The unity in a language system cannot be grasped through an algorithm. An algorithm tends to obliterate the basically different regularities pertaining to the different grammatical levels. The unity must be sought in the basic traits which determine the typological 'look' of a language, and these basic traits begin to emerge precisely through an integrating view of the different regularities corresponding to the different levels. As an example I should cite the trait of 'weak centralisation' manifested in the accent system on the one side, and manifested in the morpho-syntactic and syntactic systems on the other.

A related problem is the question of which model the

grammarians should choose. There cannot be any single mould in which a grammar ought to be cast; at least among the models available up to this date I do not see any. But partial models may be very helpful and illuminating: e.g. predicate calculus for certain problems in semantics. In any case it should be borne in mind that a model is always an analogon, and that there will always be a point where the analogy ends and where linguistic reality is more comprehensive. Model theory is not to be equated with theory of science. The unity of a language system - and of language in general - is not to be sought within a model, nor within a theory of grammar, but rather within a theory of language.

A further problem is that of the apparent antinomy between synchrony and diachrony: does the grammarian have to choose either one or the other aspect? E. Coseriu has shown (see Coseriu 1975:3f.) that to separate synchrony from diachrony is one thing, and to distinguish between the two is another: distinctions between the two must be made ('verschiedene Gesichtspunkte'), but they should not be separated. This means for us that a particular basic trait of a language, like the descriptive technique in Cahuilla, can only come to light when seen in a dynamic perspective which takes into account both the fossilised and the most recent manifestations.

A last point deserving to be mentioned is that of the 'intuitions of a native speaker'. In contradistinction to some other grammars of 'exotic' languages, this Grammar gives ample room to the treatment of semantic phenomena. I wish

to contradict the still widespread belief that only native speakers can do adequate descriptions of their own language - and of semantic regularities in particular. It is true that one must have a very intimate knowledge of a language in order to fully understand the basic principles at work in the process of signification. But the belief that one cannot acquire such a knowledge is unwarranted.

To a not inconsiderable extent this work was motivated by the conviction that the study of the semantic regularities of an American Indian language is both necessary and possible.

Footnotes

¹For an overview see the discussion by J.M.E. Moravcsik (Moravcsik 1967:209ff.). I am indebted to Dr. Holger van den Boom for drawing my attention to these problems.

²Such comparisons can either be occasional and more accidental, or they can be more systematic. In the latter case, it is almost inevitable to concentrate on a few selected languages instead of a multitude of languages. The results of my comparisons with English and German are published in Seiler 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975.

³On the concept of purpose and of teleonomy see the opening statement of the 'Universalienprojekt' currently undertaken at the University of Cologne (Seiler 1973a:6-19).

⁴This reminds us of L. Hjelmslev's famous dictum (1966:129):
'C'est seulement par la typologie que la linguistique s'élève à des points de vue tout à fait généraux et devient une science. Il est vrai qu'à cette possibilité glorieuse correspond pour le moment très peu de réalité. La tâche est proposée, mais encore loin d'être accomplie'.

⁵One of the most illuminating treatments of these questions is Katznel'son's (Katznel'son 1972/1974).

⁶This term is borrowed from Roderick Jacobs's study 'Syntactic compression and semantic change' (Jacobs 1974:232).

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